

# THE BULLETIN

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SCHOOL SOCIAL WORKERS

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## EDITORIAL COMMENT

A number of requests have come to the Executive Office of NASSW from time to time regarding the acceptance, use, and success of the school social worker in an authoritative role. Is there integration of attendance service as part of the total service of the school social worker? Is the school social worker effective in her use of authority? How does the school social worker assess this part of her service? How is it assessed administratively? In answer to such a request there was discussion at the Executive Committee meeting in September, 1950. As an outgrowth of this discussion the Editorial Committee was requested to devote the March, 1951, issue to a series of articles on "The Integration of School Social Work and Attendance Services". The Executive Committee chose four cities from which to request material as representative of those in which attendance work is the responsibility of the school social worker. The ensuing articles describe not only the philosophy of the program and a brief account of its development in that particular city, but also show the individual worker's responsibility in carrying an authoritative role and in initiating legal action as part of her work with parents and children. It is interesting to note the common elements in these different programs.

It is hoped that this series of articles will be of interest to school social workers and to school administrators and will stimulate discussion about this area of work in relation to the school social work program.

# THE INTEGRATION OF SCHOOL SOCIAL WORK AND ATTENDANCE SERVICES

## I. A Description of the Indianapolis Program

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It is difficult to get a proper perspective and to follow in sequence the development and changes in philosophy of the services of a department that has been in operation for more than twenty-five years. Procedures, techniques and points of view have been formulated gradually out of experience, new insight and understanding. The services of the school social workers and the Social Service Department have been developed from the attendance department and include responsibility for the problems of non-attendance.

The organization, the number of staff members and professional qualifications have changed with the addition of new responsibilities and with changes in the demands of the schools for special kinds of service. At the present time, Social Service is a department under the supervision of the Superintendent of Schools. The office of the director is in the Administrative Office of the schools and there are four district offices located in high school buildings. In each district office there is an assistant director who supervises the school social workers assigned to the district. Twenty-seven school social workers work out of these district offices. Each is assigned to a district that is identified by the boundaries of the elementary schools in the area. The district of the school social worker may include from one to five or six elementary schools depending upon the enrollment of the schools or on the number of children referred and in need of help. In addition, each semester, six graduate students in field work training from the School of Social Work are given supervision by two school social workers who serve as student supervisors.

Gradually, to meet the challenges of a broader and more comprehensive program, qualifications of workers have been raised. As early as 1917, an A.B. degree was a minimum standard for workers in the attendance department. As the program of schools of social work developed, requirements for professional training were included. Teacher training and experience, while considered helpful, have never been required as qualifications for appointment. From the beginning, the work of the department has been considered a social work program.



At the present time, applicants for the position of school social worker are required to have had a minimum of one year in a professional school of social work, and when appointed are encouraged to complete the second year of training for a master's degree in social work as soon as possible.

Although attendance services were initiated in the schools earlier than school social work programs, they have developed side by side with varying degrees of coordination. The extent to which attendance work is separate from or integrated into the school social work program is to some degree determined by the general attitude regarding non-attendance problems. In the minds of many individuals there continues to be the attitude that a child who can not stay in school regularly deserves and should be punished by due process of law through court action. Inherent in this point of view is the concept that certain symptoms of behavior can be separated from others even though the primary interest is in meeting the total needs of the child. Perhaps the inclination to isolate attendance as a unique and special problem requiring punishment and authoritative handling dates from that time fifty or sixty years when less than half the children of school age were enrolled in school and direct means were necessary to establish community acceptance of the necessity of attendance; perhaps it is based on a carry-over of the worker's own feeling of fear of punishment for absence when he was in school; perhaps it is the result of arbitrary methods that were used by some attendance workers in their efforts to enforce the law. It may be because a child's persistent irregularity of attendance is interpreted as a wilful and premeditated act of rebellion unrelated to other personal and social problems with which he may be struggling; or it might be because teachers and others who are responsible may feel a little resentful and sensitive because the child appears to be disobedient or rejecting toward them. All of those possibilities involve attitudes and feelings on the part of adults in the situation and are a denial of the concept that behavior is a composite of experiences and training that somewhat determine conduct and ways in which an individual is able to meet his problems.

In 1921, the present Indiana Attendance Law was enacted providing that all children should attend school until sixteen years of age. In 1925, the name of the Department was changed from the Attendance Department to the Social Service Department, and the workers were given the official title of home visitors. It was apparent at that time that the interest and effort of the workers should be focused on the causes of non-attendance rather than on the improvement of attendance as an end

in itself. The change in the names of the Department and staff members represented an important and significant step in the shift of emphasis and in the development of service for school children. It involved the relinquishing of focus on enforcement in the administration of the compulsory attendance law because the use of force as the primary method of keeping children in school had proved to be disappointing and ineffective. Instead it became the responsibility of the workers to give attention to the situations and circumstances in the home and school life of the children that prevented them from being in regular attendance and from sustaining an interest in school.

The extension of service came, in part, as a result of the day by day experience of the workers. They learned that irregular attendance and poor school adjustment were, in general, only a part of a disturbing behavior pattern of the children with whom they became acquainted. They observed that an infinite number and variety of other symptoms, such as stealing, aggressiveness, day dreaming, were also involved to make the conduct of children unacceptable. All of these symptoms and many problems in the child's family appeared to be interrelated and to have a bearing on the child's absence from school so that the worker found it necessary to work with the child in relation to these problems along with the school attendance difficulties. Perhaps it was because of this observation and experience that the authoritative aspect of dealing with the special symptom of non-attendance took its proper place in the total working relationship.

Changes in procedures, techniques and philosophy have evolved as workers have increased their understanding and insight into the problems and needs of children. These changes have, to a great extent, paralleled those that have taken place in education as teachers have more and more centered their interest on the child's being taught rather than on the curriculum and subject material. Teachers and school social workers have come a long way in the understanding of the dynamics of behavior and in their efforts to help children in a constructive way. Knowledge and insight are utilized in their efforts to help children who show symptoms of behavior that prevent satisfactory participation in the class room. More and more services to the child have become a team work process involving the cooperative effort of teacher, child, parents, school social worker, other school personnel and workers in other community agencies.

The school social worker by training and experience is equipped to work with the child in relation to his school adjustment and to cooperate with the teacher as she works with him. A statement of function which



is used as a guide by the school social worker is available to teachers. It includes the following explanation of philosophy, objectives and methods:

The Social Service Department makes available to each child in elementary and secondary grades casework service to help him make use of his school experiences to the maximum of his ability. This service supplements that of other school personnel and is carried on in very close cooperation with them. The school social worker is directly concerned with the child whose behavior and attitudes are such that he will need individual help before he can take full advantage of the educational facilities available in the schools.

There is opportunity in the school through the teacher, school social worker and other school personnel for early identification and treatment of children indicating difficulties in making a good school adjustment.

The school social worker may provide service in the following ways:

I. *Direct Service with Child.* A. Casework with children who express difficulties in school by: 1. Educational problems. — a. Academic failure in spite of average or above average ability without obvious cause. — b. Social maladjustment related to physical or mental handicap. This includes help to complete a child's transfer to school better equipped to meet his needs if the child's behavior and attitudes toward the handicap and change indicates he cannot make full use of these services without individual help.

2. Behavior problems which indicate emotional maladjustment such as: a. Withdrawn, fearful, shy behavior. — b. Aggressive, hostile behavior. — c. Excessive attention-seeking behavior. — d. Inability to accept authority. — e. Truancy. — f. Stealing and lying. — g. Non-attendance. — h. Bizarre behavior.

B. Economic Assistance — This aid includes high school and college scholarships and student aid from private sources; referral for clothing and school supplies from public funds.

II. *Service with School Personnel.* A. Principals and teachers. — 1. Interpreting the home situation as it affects the child's adjustment in school. — 2. Interpreting factors outside the home that are related to the child's difficulties at school. — 3. Working with teachers toward early recognition of personality and behavior difficulties. — 4. Arranging for case conferences with teachers and principals, school social workers, and other agency workers interested in the child. — 5. Participating in faculty meetings, in committees and other group projects.



B. Services with school nurse and doctor. The school social worker does not have direct responsibility for health problems. She cooperates with this service when the child's health problem is the result of or is responsible for his social maladjustment.

C. Psychologist. The school social worker refers the child to the psychologist for testing when it is felt the results of such tests and the recommendations of the psychologist may give a clearer understanding of his needs and be helpful in future planning with him.

D. Director of Special Education. The school social worker participates in the planning for a special education program when there is evidence of some social maladjustment.

III. *Service with the Home.* A. To help parents understand more clearly their children's attitudes, behavior, capacities, and adjustment in relation to school.

B. To interpret the educational philosophy and methods of instruction.

C. To help parents learn how they can work with the school for the benefit of the child. — 1. Arranging conferences between parent and school personnel for better mutual understanding of a child and his problems in school. — 2. Stimulating participation in school activities such as study groups, conferences and P. T. A.

IV. *Services with the Community.* A. To have a working relationship with other social agencies by — 1. Sharing with workers of other agencies the school's understanding of the child's capacity and his social and academic adjustment to school. — 2. Referring to other agencies those situations whose needs cannot be met by the services of Social Service Department of Public Schools. — 3. Integrating the work of the Social Service Department of Public Schools with other agencies in meeting the needs of the child through a cooperative working relationship. Each agency through conference should carefully determine its responsibility when services of more than one are indicated.

B. To help interpret the school program to the community and to participate in general community planning.

C. To encourage parents to participate in general community activities organized for a better school and community life.

On the basis of the statement of function, the school social worker makes a special kind of contribution and assumes certain specific responsibilities in working with the child and other individuals interested in him.

When a child is referred by the teacher, one of the first responsibilities of the school social worker is to establish a relationship with the child that makes it possible for him to begin to work on his own difficulties. Having accomplished this the worker may be able, through the casework skill and cooperation with other school personnel and resources, to provide the support which the child needs to help him to become an interested and participating member of his school group.

In the process of working with a child, the matter of irregular attendance, if it is one of the problems, is considered a part of his total behavior pattern. Experience has indicated that when irregular attendance and truancy are persistent, there are invariably other problems with which the child needs help. Also it has been observed that attendance frequently improves when other worries and tensions are lessened. For these reasons, it seems important that the child who exhibits these problems should be provided with the same professional skill, understanding and treatment that is available to children having other difficulties. In addition, there seems to be no practical way in which the symptoms of attendance can be isolated and thus receive a special kind of treatment. Nor is there a practical method whereby one worker, who has already established a relationship of confidence with a child, can transfer this special responsibility to another person. This plan of working on all problems is effective as more and more schools handle routine absences and refer only those children whose absence is complicated by other personal, school or social difficulties. This procedure requires time in which to accomplish the transition from using the school social worker for work on all absentees to conserving time for work on serious problems.

The legal and authoritative aspects of attendance raise many questions in relation to the treatment process of children. It also depends upon the use and understanding of the function of the casework relationship and service. Consistent with current social casework philosophy and practice, the school social worker recognizes that there is a place for the constructive use of authority in working with a child and the setting of limits within which he should be helped to function if he is to become a self-disciplined or self-directing individual. A social caseworker may and does assume such a role many times without disturbing the relationship with the child. A parent must work with his child cooperatively but has a responsibility at the same time to establish limits and to formulate a general pattern to which the child can conform. The methods and attitudes by which this is accomplished make it acceptable and constructive for the child or perhaps destructive if handled arbitrarily and without



consideration for the child's feelings and motives. Certainly a basic feeling of security in relation to the parent makes the authority of the parent acceptable.

Likewise, each individual throughout life meets difficulties and makes adjustments that involve authoritative limits. Immature and insecure persons may have difficulty in accepting or adjusting to them. However, it is recognized that most people can function and feel more comfortable within a definite framework in which they may achieve goals with safety and security.

In the school, effective cooperative work in helping a child implies a common philosophy of dealing with difficulties in a positive way. There are certain responsibilities in the teacher-child or school social worker-child relationship that require the setting and maintaining of standards. These are implicit in working with a child who refuses to work, fails to follow general instructions, interferes with or disrupts the work of other children, stays away from school, or does other similar things. Any or all of these involve elements of authority that are essential if the child is to learn to develop acceptable conduct for himself. This obligation does not exclude the understanding, interpretation and encouragement that provide the incentive and support that are necessary if the child is to make use of the guidance of the teacher and the help of the social worker.

The law and the Juvenile Court represents the final resource for help. Occasionally the child's problems are so complicated by unhappy family relationships, community influences and other experiences that the resources of the court are needed. If the use of the Juvenile Court appears to be an important factor in the solution of a situation, the child and his family are entitled to and are given the same careful interpretation of its contribution as is given for the use of any other agency or resource that might provide help; for example, the Child Guidance Clinic or Family Service Agency.

If the Juvenile Court can be used as an additional resource in establishing desirable and constructive limits for the child, it may and frequently does provide the necessary and acceptable protection and support for him. If the school social worker together with the child and his family have discussed and faced squarely the problems that are involved and the necessary steps toward some kind of solution, there is usually little need for the child to feel that what is done is punitive, that he is not understood or that he is not liked.

In using the Juvenile Court, it is important for the school social worker to understand its general policies, methods of procedure and general philosophy. This is essential if the worker is to determine whether or not its services can be helpful in working with a child. The Juvenile Court is a judicial agency in which decisions are made on the basis of evidence that is presented; but it, too, is interested in the treatment and rehabilitation of the child. Judges and probation workers, like the teachers and school social workers, have learned by experience that discipline applied directly toward the correction of a single or isolated offense rarely accomplishes permanent improvement.

Most modern courts consider their program as a social service resource. Their objectives are aimed toward rehabilitation through supportive help given by probation workers. The court also takes the position that it has few services to offer in these cases beyond the casework services that can be and are provided by the school social worker.

The cooperative relationship with the Juvenile Court as the legal agency which the school social worker uses has been worked out in a written interagency agreement. The statements of policies, procedures and mutual responsibilities included were developed by a committee from the two agencies. As a first step after the child and his family have accepted the court as a needed help, the school social worker submits a written summary to the intake worker at the Juvenile Court. Information about the family, the home, family relationships, special problems that have been observed, together with a careful description of the child, his behavior, attitudes, school record and the treatment provided, are included. Following this a conference is arranged for discussion and planning. This conference may include not only the court intake worker, the school social worker and supervisor, but also representatives of other family or child welfare agencies if the family is known to them. Recommendations for a court hearing or for further treatment through the use of other resources are worked out. Usually the cases that are referred to the court involve problems of parental neglect, lack of a satisfactory and permanent home, lack of official custody if the child lives with relatives, or serious behavior difficulties in which the child is involved. If a decision is made that the help of the judge and a court hearing are indicated, the school social worker participates.

The family understands that the worker will be in court with them and that the objective of the plan is to help the child and all who are interested in him. There is danger that the child who feels insecure in



all his relationships in the family, school and age group may feel punished and more rejected because of his experience with the judge. On the other hand, there are many examples to illustrate that the child has directly profited by the experience to the extent that he has found it possible more easily to accept the responsibilities involved in being in school and in conforming to more acceptable standards.

On the basis of practice and experience, it is apparent that the use of the authoritative approach to the problem of non-attendance, through the use of the court, often does not result in improvement of attendance. The use of this method is apt to ignore the causes of the difficulties and thus limits the chances for permanent change in the child's behavior. Also it is apt to cause the child to reject the person who is responsible for his referral to court and thereby to nullify the effect of the court directives. If, however, non-attendance is accepted as one way and usually a rather normal way in which the child may be showing rebellion, dissatisfaction and unhappiness in relation to his total experience, it can be incorporated as a part of the understanding and helping relationship with the school social worker. Within this working relationship there may be a point at which it appears important and necessary to make use of authority to help to establish the child's responsibility for his conduct in relation to the school. When used in this way, the court, also, can give consideration to changes in the physical environment or in general attitudes that may make improvement possible.

This method of study, analyses and evaluation of all the factors that contribute to the child's problems makes it possible to keep the objectives centered on giving him the necessary help to be more successful and happy. It gives him the feeling of being accepted and understood if he and the school social worker consistently face the reality problems with which he is struggling. This requires that the worker must be able to be permissive and at the same time be comfortable in making use of authority to maintain limits that the child can understand in relation to the problems he must meet. If the spirit as well as the mechanics of this procedure can be sustained as an integral part of the treatment process, there seems little need for two workers, one permissive—the other authoritative.

# THE INTEGRATION OF SCHOOL SOCIAL WORK AND ATTENDANCE SERVICES

## II. A Description of the Minneapolis Program

JULIA BREIDENBACH, MRS. GLADYS GREISMAN, BARBARA HALL

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With other changes in the philosophy of education in recent years has come increasing recognition that one of its primary aims should be the social adjustment of the child. The objective of our schools is no longer merely to make the child literate. There is a growing awareness of the fact that his ability to live reasonably comfortably with his fellows is of more pressing importance than his skill in reading and writing. The child brings to school not only his mind to be trained but also his complex personality, the outgrowth of the many environmental influences which have affected him since birth. Since the school is one part of the child's environment which in some measure can be controlled and manipulated, educators possess and are utilizing an unparalleled opportunity for developing and promoting mental and physical health. Briefly, the school is now placing the emphasis on the child rather than on the curriculum.

If we accept the concept that effective education in a democracy must be universal—that there shall be educational opportunity for all—it follows that the school must provide specialized services for those children who without special help are unable to make adequate use of what the school has to offer. For this reason school social workers have become an integral part of the staff of the Minneapolis Public Schools. The school social worker or visiting teacher works with the child, the parent, school personnel, and other community agencies as one member of the school's professional team seeking to help the individual child find a personally satisfying and socially effective place in the school and community. Using a casework approach, she provides a preventive mental health service by attempting to help school personnel identify children who are experiencing social and emotional difficulties and to remedy these problems before they result in more seriously disturbed behavior.

Legislation for compulsory school attendance, the second step following the establishment of a tax-supported school system has further supported society's belief in the rightness of universal education and has placed upon the schools a two-fold responsibility to society and to the



individual. It has delineated the philosophy that each child has a right to attend school which may be denied him by no one, and equally that society may put its need for an educated citizenry ahead of individual rights to choose for or against schooling. To the school social worker, the public schools, on behalf of society, have delegated primary responsibility for providing the special services which may be required to realize this objective for individual children.

Infraction of the school attendance law has come to be recognized with other forms of deviant behavior as symptomatic and indicative of maladjustment evolving from one or more of a variety of causes and requiring a kind of help that is more constructive than force alone. The school social worker is a caseworker trained in understanding the human personality and in techniques of helping the individual who by himself has been unable to work out a pattern of behavior comfortable both to himself and others.

When such children in the Minneapolis Schools are brought to her attention, the school social worker attempts to diagnose the cause of the problem, and to formulate and carry out a constructive plan of treatment. It is her job (1) to know and call upon the services available within the school system and in the community at large on behalf of her client, the child; (2) to interpret the purpose and program of the school to parent and agency workers, and (3) to lend her specialized knowledge as a consultant to other school personnel.

A child's desire to absent himself from school may be caused by his lack of intellectual ability to do the work, lack of interest in the curriculum, or, in the case of a child of superior ability, by sheer boredom. Fear of punishment or ridicule before his group may also be the cause of a child's absence. Poor social adjustment may result in a wish to escape from school companions. Critical parental attitudes toward school and lack of interest in education may undermine a child's enthusiasm and interest. There are parents also who foster truancy by their practice of keeping children at home for reasons of personal convenience. To many children whose lives are drab and devoid of recreational outlets, truancy offers an opportunity for adventure and thrills. Sometimes excessive absence is evidence of psychological conflicts with unconscious motivations; in such cases the school social worker enlists psychiatric counsel and treatment while she continues with guidance from the psychiatrist to interpret the child's needs to the school.

The school can do much to counteract many causes of truancy. A child's medical record should be explored in an effort to discover if treatment is indicated. One must determine whether he has the intellectual capacity to do the work of his grade; if not, he may be re-graded or the work geared to the level of his ability. A sympathetic and understanding teacher can do much to create in a child an interest in school. His desire for play and recreation is fostered through organized recreation in the form of clubs, athletics, band, dramatics, etc. Occasional field trips will appeal to a child's desire for exploration and adventure. The school social worker may attempt to modify faulty parental attitudes, and in personal interviews with the child give him an opportunity to express his thoughts and feelings and to participate in planning treatment.

In the Minneapolis school system the school social work department, under the leadership of the senior consultant in school social work, operates as a staff service in every public school with limited service to parochial and other private schools.

The thirty-one members of the staff have assignments of one to five public schools and give service, related only to attendance, to parochial and other private schools within their districts. The assignment is determined through consultation with the principals, the consultant in school social work, and the administration. Size of the assignment is determined by the size of the school population, the type of district, other community services available, and by the demand for the services of the school social worker at the local school level.

Each worker has an office in one of the schools in her area, but her services are a part of the program of each of her assigned schools. In most instances she maintains a definite schedule of time at each school. Administratively she is responsible to the principal of each school to which she is assigned in regard to work concerning that school. In addition she is administratively responsible through the senior consultant in school social work, to the assistant superintendent in charge of secondary education, and also to the director of attendance and research for all functions related to attendance and tuition cases.

Attendance service was not the visiting teacher's responsibility from the time of her first appointment in 1916 in the Minneapolis Schools. Gradually, as understanding of the causes of truancy and irregular attendance and their treatment grew, this service came to be seen as most effectively a part of the visiting teacher's function. In 1916 an attendance department was carrying this responsibility through a staff of attendance



officers who worked out from a central office making home and school calls on attendance cases. As more visiting teachers, home visitors, and vocational teachers, (the three titles used interchangeably) were assigned to schools to work intensively with children who needed help in their school adjustment, attendance problems were referred to them. These workers supervised attendance at the local school level, working with those children who responded to help and referring other children to the attendance department. More awareness by both visiting teacher and attendance worker of the symptomatic nature of these problems resulted in more intensive casework and more frequent referrals to the child guidance clinic.

An analysis in 1931 of the work of the visiting teachers, the school social workers as the attendance officers, now trained in social work, were being called, and the counselors contributed greatly to the clarification of the function of each staff and showed a serious need for a reorganization of services in the area of attendance. The study pointed out that the function of the school social workers, to implement the provisions of the compulsory attendance law, involved not merely forcing children back into school but a responsibility for studying causes of the problem and providing treatment. In addition to this the school social workers were receiving cases in which attendance was not involved from schools that had no visiting teacher. The visiting teachers were doing essentially the same work, with no duplication however, as they did not work in the same schools. Both workers were making court referrals, the policy being that the worker with whom the case had originated should take it into court.

In 1934 the department of attendance was abolished; the school social workers and the visiting teachers were consolidated into one staff with the term visiting teacher being retained. There is now a growing preference for the title school social worker and a return to its unofficial use. Merger of the two staffs has resulted in a more equitable distribution of service to all schools, a more balanced case load among the workers, increased facility in routine attendance service, and greater effectiveness in giving social work services.

The function of a school social work department in the area of attendance problems can be understood and its effectiveness appraised only in relation to the total community-school philosophy with regard to school attendance. The caseworker approaching these problems from a background of training which emphasizes the importance of the indi-

vidual's needs may easily overlook their significance to school personnel in terms of legal and financial implications.

The school social worker, in evaluating her role in helping a child who is chronically absent from school, must consider two sometimes conflicting responsibilities: first, that to the child as her client in the client-worker relationship which differs little, if any, from that as it is experienced in any social agency; second, that to her fellow-workers on the "school team"—her principal and other administrative personnel: the counselor, school nurse and other special service workers, and, most important, the child's teacher or teachers.

In considering the visiting teacher's responsibility to the faculty, we need to explore briefly the feelings of teachers about the child who is absent excessively. There is the realistic problem of repeating material the student has missed and providing for "make-up" work, a problem that becomes more burdensome as the grade level increases, which not unnaturally causes even the most kindly and understanding teachers to regard the perennial absentee with a jaundiced eye. So long as teachers are held responsible for preparing the student for the next year's work, be it third grade or college, this consideration will loom large in their reaction to the chronic non-attendant.

Another factor less easily perceived but no less important in the teacher's unhappiness with absentees is the element of personal rejection which the teacher feels as an individual as well as part of the educational process implicit in such behavior. An astute psychiatrist, speaking to a conference of educators, pointed out that teachers are the butt of much hostility from the general public because to that part of John Q which never grows up, "teacher" still represents the authority John Q feels he must battle. Consciously or unconsciously, teachers feel this, and in the act of the child's staying away from school he finds its open expression. Other adults recognize and frequently condone it when they chuckle at some youngster's "playing hookey" and reminisce about their own similar escapades. Teachers express their exasperation and defeat by saying, "We can't help them if they aren't here!"

Insofar as the school social worker forgets her responsibility to either, her client the student, or her co-workers the school team, she is ineffective in her total job in relation to attendance work. Unfortunately, the two facets may sometimes be just that, arrayed one against the other; and it becomes a neat tightrope trick to negotiate a solution. We have mentioned that the caseworker whose training has emphasized the im-

portance of the individual client may overlook the viewpoint of the teacher and administrator; but let us not forget that the one who becomes a school social worker after a teaching career may quite as easily overlook the needs of the youngster and the meaning of his behavior to him in his total adjustment. Such an oversight can mean a mechanical enforcement of regulations, in the fashion of the traditional truant officer, if carried to the extreme. It will lead to ineffectiveness of service as surely as error in the other direction will alienate her fellow-workers and destroy the strength peculiar to her position as a school social worker.

This last concept—that the school social worker's special position makes possible a type of service not otherwise available—should have further examination. Brief mention has already been made of the role of the school in assisting the pupil to a happier social and emotional adjustment. In considering specifically the function of the school social worker in problems of non-attendance, we need to give attention to the authoritarian base from which we work. We school social workers believe that while it occasionally creates problems for us, it gives strength and clarity to the total job.

An imaginary case may illustrate: Johnny, age fourteen, is referred to the school social worker by the attendance clerk. The routine check of reasons for absence has led the school social worker to suspect that Johnny is skipping school. The school social worker may make a home call on the spot; after all, it is possible that Johnny is out without his parents' knowledge. We neglected to mention, in discussing the visiting teacher's school and community responsibility above, the fact that with authority over their children delegated to the school by parents for the hours school is in session there is also a responsibility for those children to their parents. Parents have been, and have a right to be, very unhappy when they have not been informed immediately of their child's absence.

The difference between a home call made simply as a truant officer and one as a school social worker lies chiefly in the use of available information and the attitude which the latter brings to the job. Except in cases where time is the chief element—and they are relatively rare—it is possible to get at least a "quick sketch" of Johnny. What kind of school work has he done recently as compared to that of the past years? Is this current absence an acute or a chronic problem? Does the nurse know him? The counselor? Do ability and achievement tests give any clue? The files will yield at least a preliminary picture in less than fifteen minutes.



If Johnny isn't available at home, the next problem is to get in touch with one of his parents as soon as possible. Whether the interview is with Johnny, his mother or father or all three, the school social worker's role is determined not only by her position as a representative of the authority of the school but also by her attitude as a skilled caseworker. "You, Johnny, have a problem. I am informing you, your parents, who are responsible for you, of that problem. My job is to help you solve whatever the difficulty is that is keeping Johnny out of school, but in the long run the solution of that problem will be up to the three of you. If you, with whatever help the school and I can offer, cannot find a solution which will permit regular school attendance, it will be my duty to ask the help of the court for all of us."

Obviously this is not a pat formula for a single interview. In addition, one does not set the limit of "the next time, you go to court" until sure of one's readiness to follow out this plan. Nevertheless, with the child and/or the family who lack the strengths to meet the problem so long as it is left to them alone, such facing with reality—the legal requirement for school attendance—has a specific, mobilizing quality. The individual floundering in a maze of confusion, uncertainty and doubt can find in it a measure by which to judge his performance, the comfort of known requirements and an authority greater than himself. The psychological ramifications of this relationship, for both client and worker, had best be left for another paper. It should be said, however, that the caseworker who cannot be comfortable with the demands of authority had better use her talents in other than school social work.

Although all school social workers may have wished at one time or other that they could be unhampered by such legal controls, there is much more to be said for them than against them. Through them society guarantees to its children the right to attend school for what society has judged to be a minimal period. We are still confronted often by the fourteen and fifteen-year-old for whom our best judgment would plan something other than standard junior high school.

The problem of which court to use is not a large issue in our system. The district court designated to handle juvenile cases hears all cases of delinquency on the part of minors, and truancy from school is so classified. The problem arises only when the child's age or special factors in the situation dictate that the parent be the one charged. Under our law the parent may be brought into municipal court, fined, sentenced or placed on probation for certain failures in his responsibilities to his children, one of which is to see that they attend school regularly. This law

has been used against parents occasionally when a more generalized charge of neglect did not seem valid. Neglect cases are filed in district (juvenile) court usually through the county welfare board. At a first appearance in juvenile court, the child is customarily placed on probation, and we then have the services of the county probation office in behalf of our client.

In Minnesota with its long tradition of school attendance at least through the grammar grades we school social workers face little group resistance to this requirement. Both parents and children recognize if they do not agree with the right of the state to enforce it. That such group recognition exists poses a further problem for the parent or child who chooses to ignore the law. The out-of-school child is automatically a member of the out-group if not a total isolate. To the child of grade school age this can mean serious psychological and emotional damage; he is thrown back upon the resources of his parents and himself at just the time when he needs to be forming group allegiances. This fact becomes an important consideration when we are weighing the values of court action against a voluntary casework approach.

It should be clear at this point that we regard our work with problems of non-attendance as a responsibility calling for the best in casework skills. To work within a defined authoritative structure is basically no different from the caseworker's function in any client-worker relationship; all life has reality limitations, and our clients need help in finding satisfactions within them. Because we as school social workers are frequently in the position of invoking the penalty for failure to meet the requirements of that reality, we are identified by our client, and sometimes ourselves become confused in the identity, with the penalty. We need to remember, to point out to ourselves and to the client, that the law is greater than either of us and not a personal weapon to be used at our choice. Because of the element of choice as well as chance in enforcement, however, we must recognize that our client may be unable to divorce us from the penalty and will see us only as the opposition to which he is hostile. In some such cases it will be necessary to accept the role in which he has cast us and to see that other helping services are available to him from a source outside the schools.

It has been maintained that no single worker can carry the dual assignment. It is probable that some workers are more comfortable and therefore more effective in either the voluntary or the authoritarian situation. We believe, however, that as the worker becomes skilled in analyz-

ing the emotional components not only of the client's feelings toward her but also of her own reaction to her role, and the client's response to it; is it possible to do an effective job in both capacities, even with the same client. That this can be done is attested to by the mother who commented to the school social worker who had been instrumental in taking her son into court, "I know you've been interested, you and Mr. . . . . . (the probation officer) and have done everything you can to help me and Sonny."

We have discussed some criteria of effectiveness as seen by the social worker as well as those recognized by school administration. The latter are perhaps too inclined to judge results by the absence sheet; the visiting teacher is effective if the list is short, contrariwise when it grows longer. There are too many factors involved in this picture to make an accurate measure of a social breakdown over which no one as yet has control: a general wave of sickness, economic problems which send mothers to work, a spell of bad weather which gives opportunity to the normal human desire for "an extra day off", or the equally normal adolescent rebellion that produces occasional instances of group truancy. While we keep in mind the rightful concerns of the fellow-members of our school team in the overall problem of attendance, we need also to keep their attention focused on the meaning of non-attendance to the individual pupil. In this manner we may all arrive at a measure of our effectiveness which, if less concrete, is more realistic.



# THE INTEGRATION OF SCHOOL SOCIAL WORK AND ATTENDANCE SERVICES

## III. A Description of the San Diego Program\*

GRACE W. MITCHELL, Visiting Teacher, Guidance Bureau

San Diego Public Schools

After the Commonwealth Fund demonstration introduced visiting teachers into the San Diego city schools, attendance officers continued to function there. It was very gradually that the distinction between their two services melted away.

The first and essential step occurred after several years of the visiting teacher program when, twenty years ago, an experienced social worker was appointed attendance officer. Another followed, and another. Since the visiting teachers were assigned to specific schools, the principals, as they began to accept visiting teacher help in other areas, increasingly found it fruitful to use visiting teachers for regular work with children whose symptom was non-attendance. When the central administration decided to extend visiting teacher service to secondary schools, attendance work became one of the recognized services of a visiting teacher. Visiting teacher and attendance worker for years have had like assignments and identical school social work duties. It was not until two years ago, however, that the title "Attendance Counselor" disappeared.

San Diego visiting teachers, both those who began as attendance officers and those who began as visiting teachers, feel that persistent non-attendance, like persistent fighting or thumb sucking, requires planned treatment by a worker trained to explore what that behavior means to the child—a worker, moreover, who is within the framework of the school but outside the pattern of administrative or teaching responsibility for the child.

Many children referred for non-attendance are found to have had earlier symptoms of unsatisfactory growth. Many prove, when studied, to be experiencing present conditions which interfere even more seriously with their use of school opportunities. A fairly large proportion of secondary school children whose problems are severe show at one time or another the symptom of non-attendance. For coherent treatment of the individual, San Diego visiting teachers feel that handling attendance as part of total casework with a child has advantages which outweigh the complications of the authoritative role.

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\* See Ethel E. Galloway, "Visiting Teachers and Attendance", *Understanding the Child*, Vol. XIX (1950); reprint *The Bulletin*, Vol. XXV (1950).

For the child who comes to his attention, the visiting teacher endeavors to unify the activities of all school and community personnel who can contribute to the child's growth. Around the core of visiting teacher service and largely around needs uncovered in visiting teacher casework has grown the Guidance Bureau which now consists of a psychiatric clinic, psychologists, visiting teachers, home tutors for children physically unable to attend school, speech therapists, lip reading teachers, the school census department, the supervisor of special and adjustment classes, and the coordinator of vocational guidance.

The Bureau's director is also director of guidance in the schools, responsible for stimulating development of guidance philosophy and programs throughout the district. That guidance belongs primarily to the domain of the classroom teacher is recognized in staff meetings and teachers' institutes, in publications and organization programs, in the daily work of Guidance Bureau personnel.

In secondary schools, teachers and counselors are led in their guidance functions by two vice-principals, of boys and girls respectively. Vice-principals confer regularly with the visiting teacher, the nurse, and the attendance secretary. This secretary not only compiles the absence lists and records but receives and makes telephone calls about the day's absences and, when the pupil returns, accepts and classifies the student's excuse. The school nurse has already seen all children whose excuses concern health and has rated these absences. The classifications are illness, other valid excuse, reasons excused by family but not by school regulations, and truancy.

The school nurse always, at every level, has a very important share in counseling children and parents. This is particularly true in attendance situations. Nurses check on all three-day absences. When a child is kept from school by lack of food, clothing, car fare, or medical care, the school nurse gets the family in touch with agencies which can help financially. Only when non-attendance persists does the administrator refer the problem to the visiting teacher.

Attendance problems comprise a negligible part of the elementary case loads in the experience of San Diego visiting teachers. In secondary schools the percentage varies from five to forty per cent, depending on the school, the neighborhood, the area's tradition of visiting teacher service, the administrators' and teachers' attitudes toward attendance, the visiting teacher's skill in interpreting his service, and other factors. In

general, the visiting teachers feel that San Diego administrators make discriminating referrals and do not use the visiting teacher's time for mere checking or for superficial truancy.

Failure in class work is a common cause of a child's staying away from school. From this finding visiting teachers have brought before administrators the need for more special classes where slow learners can at last succeed and for more adjustment classes where small groups and especially trained teachers can be of benefit to children whose learning is blocked by their emotions. With such classes in all secondary and most elementary schools many attendance problems have vanished. Children may also be truant from programs so easy that they provide little challenge. Visiting teachers serve on curriculum committees in order that the diverse needs revealed through their casework with children may be considered in overall planning.

For several years two or three men and women have been appointed to the visiting teacher staff as part of their preparation for vice-principalships in junior and senior high schools. Working under supervision, they deepen their understanding of behavior and of the means of releasing a child's, or a parent's, self-responsibility. Experience with the complex roots and meanings of truancy is particularly valuable, for truancy is one of the most common and one of the most difficult of secondary school problems.

A different school atmosphere and its new expectations sometimes helps a child to overcome his truancy or other school difficulties. School administrators and visiting teachers meet as the Pupil Adjustment Council to discuss the needs of specific children and to determine the most hopeful school placement. The part-time school for employed boys and girls is used more and more as an adjustment school, where hours, terms, courses, tempo, and "climate" can all be made flexible.

Nurses and visiting teachers work with many home problems which affect attendance; such as, poor family routine, economic need, and hostile and punishing family relationships. Children who are held or driven from school by inner fears, conflicts, and anxieties are referred to the Guidance Bureau Clinic for psychiatric help. Sometimes they fail to keep appointments, running away from the clinic as they do from school. School phobia, which seems to be increasing in incidence, may rise from family relationships so early and so unsatisfactory that its treatment is difficult and prolonged.



In a small number of cases, the visiting teacher feels that the most helpful plan will be the use of authority. An informal hearing is then held in the office of the Chief Probation Officer. The truant child, parents, school administrator, and visiting teacher participate, the parents having been summoned by registered letter. Of children for whom an informal hearing is held, only forty per cent have to be referred to probation later. No Juvenile Court record is kept of the informal hearing. The visiting teacher has previously submitted to the Chief Probation Officer an outline of the child's school and family history and of the steps already taken to study and meet his needs. The officer, as well as the visiting teacher, ordinarily expect that before the hearing is suggested, modifications of the school program and the resources of casework in the school will have been fully explored, and that the hearing has been presented to the family as a further though serious means of helping them accept and overcome the problem.

One visiting teacher attends the weekly staff meeting of the Probation Officer. Visiting teachers send information on any child with whom they have worked who becomes known to the Probation Office. They are sometimes asked and always permitted to attend Juvenile Court hearings on children in whom they are interested. Probation officers commonly come to the Pupil Adjustment Council when a ward is to be discussed. Routine reports of Juvenile Bureau arrests, detention home entries and releases, and Juvenile Court decisions are sent to the visiting teachers. Visiting teacher and probation officer confer frequently when they are working with the same child. Relationship problems arise, but channels between the two agencies are continually being improved in order that children who are already frustrated or rebellious or puzzled may find harmony between the expectations of their school and of the wider community.

On rare occasions in the past, parents were summoned to the District Attorney's office for an exposition of their responsibility under the school attendance law. With wider understanding of this responsibility today, the visiting teacher does not need to turn to this resource.

Youth Authority and visiting teacher cooperate closely. Before a child returns from a state institution, the parole officer presents reports from the Authority and helps determine the most favorable school placement.

Does authoritative responsibility for attendance interfere with casework relationships? The San Diego visiting teacher now and then feels that it does. A student with whom he has been working on problems quite different may one day confront him with a startled, accusing question: "*Are* you the truant officer?" The mother who has been sharing her anxieties about her daughter may be tempted to hide them as she begins to have fears about court and probation. However great the child's need for authoritative support, his tendency to evade demands may be evidenced in sullen or tempestuous reaction when the moment comes that authority must be introduced.

But indeed few children come voluntarily for help, whether to a visiting teacher, probation officer, child welfare worker, or others who help children with problems. In various situations such as stealing, sex activities, running away, home neglect, and/or others, a legal component exists in the reality which parent, child, and caseworker must resolve together.

The fact that it is the visiting teacher who brings the complaint in the case of truancy need not affect the relationship as much as one might think. In almost every casework problem the worker needs to identify both with the conflict-torn client and with the demands which the client must fulfill. The school social worker must leave the child free to express his hostilities to school and teacher, yet not free to evade his responsibilities to them, not free to project his responsibility upon them. In attendance work she must be aligned with the school law and the agencies which enforce it, yet allied with the child who finds them so bitter. Neither discipline is easy, but both are essential.

Experience has convinced San Diego visiting teachers that their relationship with a child and family may be strengthened even, rather than annihilated, by evoking court authority. For this outcome there are prerequisites. The visiting teacher must have made his dual identification with integrity and with warmth. The child's early relationships must have been such that he can take on a casework relationship and can find in it courage and incentive. For parental rejection, neglect, or surfeit has left some children so hostile or mistrustful toward adults, so insulated from interpersonal influences, that, without psychiatric treatment and profound changes in the child's personality, no true relationship can be built. Timing should take into account casework movement as well as external necessities. Visiting teacher and parent and child must

go into the informal hearing together, asking help toward keeping a law which, trying together, they have been unable to keep. If these prerequisites be met, child and visiting teacher do not face one another in cop and robber competition. Standing together, they face up to the thing that must be done.

People of our period do not like imperatives. If visiting teachers can accept them, if they can help their clients to accept them, perhaps some young people can begin to find structure in a world which has seemed but a turbid vapor of shifting values. Perhaps some may be helped to brace themselves against the rigors that threaten their day.



# THE INTEGRATION OF SCHOOL SOCIAL WORK AND ATTENDANCE SERVICES

## IV. A Description of the Pittsburgh Program

ESTHER K. DOUGLASS, District Supervisor

Division of Guidance and Child Accounting  
Pittsburgh Public Schools

The services offered by school social workers\* in the Pittsburgh Public Schools have developed out of experience over the past twenty years. During this time there has been increasing recognition of the child as an individual with more understanding of his needs and of ways to help him use school experience for his own best growth. The change from a "Department of Compulsory Attendance" to the "Division of Guidance and Child Accounting" in 1946 was one expression of this new emphasis. With this gradual change came acceptance of the need for workers who could give a different kind of service which required special skills. That there is an increasing trend toward recognition of the value of social work training has been shown by recent revisions in the State requirements affecting appointments of school social workers.

The school social work program is carried out by a staff of thirty-four workers who are assigned to six district offices. These are located in schools in different sections of the city. Each has its district supervisor and there is one supervisor with city-wide responsibility. Students from two schools of social work have field placements in the schools. The offices of the director and his staff are in the Administration Building of the Board of Public Education.

Service is offered to both elementary and secondary public and parochial schools for a specified number of hours each week. The time allotted is based upon the size of the school according to school population and the needs of the community. The worker is considered a member of the school staff while in the school; the use of his time is determined by the principal or, in secondary schools, by the vice-principal. The school itself is responsible for an initial routine check of absence. This is usually made by teachers who then refer to the principal those children who present problems of attendance. Referral is by means of a card designed for the purpose. The principal, or vice-principal as the case may

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\* School Social Workers are called Home and School Visitors in Pittsburgh Schools.

be, has responsibility for further screening of referrals prior to assignment to the worker. There is need for clear understanding by the school and the worker as to the difference between the supervision by the principal and by the supervisor in the district office. The assignment of work and the determination of the use of the worker's time is the responsibility of the principal, but must be in accord with written policies related to function and practice as established by the Division. The consideration of "how" to do the job, the development of skills and techniques is part of the supervisor's responsibility.

Casework service to the child is based on the belief that any child with a problem is entitled to help within the limitations of staff and time. Children from any grade or class, without regard to whether gifted or limited in ability, may have difficulties with which they cannot cope. Such difficulties may be the outgrowth of school expectations which the child cannot meet; for example, inability to achieve in his academic work, inability to relate himself to teachers sufficiently to learn in certain classes, inability to relate positively to classmates or teachers so that he becomes a "poor citizen", inability to benefit fully from school experience because of physical handicaps or poor health. Or, the child's difficulties may be rooted in factors stemming from his home: illness of a parent or other member of the family, lack of economic resources; marital troubles, separations, divorce; neglect or rejection of the child by his parents or guardian, lack of understanding of him as a person. It is essential to keep in mind the fact that children's behavior is often a reflection of feelings and attitudes of the adults around him. There can be no isolation of attendance as a problem unrelated to other factors which are affecting a child. Truancy and irregular attendance are symptoms—improved attendance is not possible unless the underlying causes of non-attendance are modified.

A sound relationship between the social worker and the child serves as the basis for casework service. The child needs help in understanding and facing his problem, then encouragement and support to enable him to do something about it. This cannot usually be achieved except over a period of time which varies in length with individual children. The worker himself must know and accept that change is gradual. He must also be prepared to realize that at times little change can be effected—this is especially true with adolescents whose problems are intensified by the conflicts of the age period.

The school social worker may experience some difficulty in accepting the authoritative aspect of casework service in the school setting. Because there are certain provisions in the law in regard to school attendance the worker must take responsibility of a different sort where there is persistent illegal absence. Every effort is made to help the parents return the child to school, first through careful interpretation and attempts to help them recognize the need for regular school attendance. Where absence represents the older child's rebellion against authority, the worker can often help him take responsibility for attendance.

Where illegal absence is caused by continued indifference by parents towards acceptance of their responsibilities, use of the Alderman's Court often serves as an appropriate step in the casework service to parents. Prior to this step, the worker has interpreted the attendance law and offered help to parents in meeting its requirements. This help is given over a period of time jointly determined by the parents and worker. If illegal absence continues, a legal notice is served. Further illegal absence is followed by a hearing in the Alderman's Court. (In Pittsburgh the alderman who takes this responsibility was carefully selected for his competence.) Often following this hearing parents for the first time accept their responsibilities for their children's school attendance. With the attendance law a reality for them, these parents are often enabled through the sustained help of the worker not only to meet the legal requirement, but to participate more fully in school-home relationships.

Cooperative work with the Juvenile Court is an important area in which the school social worker functions. The worker may attend hearings at the request of the Court in order to present school records or information which will be helpful in planning for a boy or girl where the child came to the Court's attention through some source other than the school. In cases where a parent, or parents, are known to be unable to provide adequate care or to maintain sufficient control over the child, including his attendance at school, or where neglect is evident, the school social worker may need the authoritative help of the Court to plan for the child and take responsibility for supervising him. Every possible means of assisting the Court is utilized. The worker's summary which includes school information is always presented in writing. The school social worker interprets to the child and to his family the reasons for the referral and makes himself available to help them throughout the preliminary investigation and the hearing. The worker's presence in Court is usually felt by the child and his family to be a service to them, and the exercising of authority is in keeping with their understanding of the



worker's responsibility as a representative of the school. It is important that the worker maintain his relationship with the child and parent throughout this experience rather than withdrawing completely because the Court referral and procedure are only a middle step in helping with the problem—work goes on toward carrying out whatever recommendations are made.

Discussion of service to the child cannot, as is evident, be separated from the consideration of work with the parent. There is constant necessity for keeping the home informed of the school's concern with the child's problems. There is need for interpretation of the school, its routines, its policies, and its activities, so that the parent may have understanding of the setting in which the child is failing to adjust. Many parents need help in understanding the behavior of their children and help in dealing with it. Where family problems are of a nature which indicate that another agency's services are needed, the school social worker has responsibility for interpreting what service is available and assisting in referral if the family requests it. The worker likewise has responsibility for exploring community resources in order to be informed of the sources for help.

Another area of service to the home lies in encouraging parents to participate in school activities such as joining the Parent-Teacher's Association, attending school programs, being present on visiting days. In smaller ways also, parents can take part, for example, by seeing that their children have proper equipment such as gym clothing, swim suits, material for sewing classes, and similar items.

In that part of his responsibility which is service to the school the worker must constantly interpret and help with understanding of case-work service. The school must be helped to know that the worker sees "the whole child" and cannot focus on one small part of a problem and show immediate results. Especially is this true in serious cases of non-attendance where absence is a symptom of other underlying problems which must first be recognized. It is often necessary to help school personnel gain increased understanding that the use of authority, particularly in the courts, is not isolated but part of the help given to parents and children as well as to the school. The worker must be prepared to help with the identification of problems within the school and referrals for service. Throughout his service the school social worker through a professional relationship helps teachers modify their attitudes towards problems of children. Interpretation may be given in individual conferences,

or by the worker's participation in case conferences with teachers, in faculty meetings, and in Parent-Teachers' Association meetings.

Besides these broader aspects of interpretation, the worker has a responsibility to inform teachers of the home conditions which may affect the child or of other facts relating to a particular boy or girl. The worker in turn gains insight through learning what the teachers know about the child. The child's progress in school frequently may depend upon plans which develop from these informal conferences, and from the teacher's recognition of the fact that change is slow, therefore, too much at once cannot be expected.

Coordination of all the resources available in the community, in the home, and in the school constitutes a real challenge to the worker since he must use these resources with discrimination in giving service to the school child. Recognizing that children express their difficulties through varied symptoms, a casework service which is focused on helping children in difficulty gain the optimum benefit from school must be based on understanding of human behavior combined with ability to accept and work with people.





## MEMBERSHIP

Membership in a professional organization is a strengthening factor for the individual practicing within that profession. This is as true for the school social worker as it has long been for members of other professions. National Association of School Social Workers has members in 38 states and in Hawaii, Puerto Rico and India.

All members receive the National Association of School Social Workers Bulletin and other materials such as Newsletter, book lists, conference programs, notices, and other publicity. Membership is determined by the training and experience of the applicant.

Applications for membership and a statement of membership requirements may be obtained from the Membership Chairman, Mrs. Helen Roell, Indianapolis Public Schools, 150 N. Meridian Street, Indianapolis, Indiana.

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